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SPECIFIC GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

Written statement submitted by the Transnational Radical Party, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[3 February 1999]

GE.99-11236 (E)

1. The outbreak of yet another increasingly brutal and costly war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in Rwanda has again transformed the Great Lakes region into an area of terror and human suffering. It has resulted in the killings of tens of thousands of unarmed civilians and grave violations of human rights, including extrajudicial executions, arbitrary detentions and torture, committed by all sides in these conflicts. It has reversed the trend of refugees and internally displaced persons from the first genocide in 1994-1996 returning to their homes and has dramatically increased their numbers.

2. Although the ongoing fighting and resulting continuous flight and influx of people between the States of the region makes it difficult to estimate the figures exactly, the reports of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) suggest that there are not less than 500,000 refugees and at least as many displaced persons in the Great Lakes region and in neighbouring countries (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Republic of the Congo, United Republic of Tanzania, Burundi, Uganda, Zambia, Sudan, Kenya).

3. For nearly four decades, the Great Lakes region has been plagued with violence and political upheaval between ethnic Tutsis and Hutus, characterized by bloodshed and massacres committed by both sides and resulting in massive exoduses and displacement of persons (Rwanda in 1959 and 1994, Burundi in 1972 and 1993, Zaire/Congo in 1993 and 1996-1997). Again during the past year, civilians bore the brunt of the conflict between the Government of Laurent Kabila and the rebel Congolese Rally for Democracy composed of a diverse coalition of anti-Kabila and national opposition groups, the Banyamulenge (Tutsis) and former dignitaries of the Mobutu era (Hutus), as well as of the conflict between the Government of Rwanda and insurgents backed by Hutus and including many senior officers who led the 1994 genocide.

4. The economic, social and political climate in the region continues to be tense and unstable. Although the protocol signed by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and UNHCR on 28 July 1998 was supposed to improve UNHCR access to refugees and improve its activities in the country, the resumption of hostilities made it even more difficult to reach the refugees and in the middle of August UNHCR was obliged to evacuate all its staff from the country. The authorities of Rwanda, on the other hand, have requested UNHCR for logistical help in returning internally displaced people to their areas of origin.

5. The Transnational Radical Party (TRP) is convinced that it is essential to focus on measures to prevent violations and denials of human rights that lead to and take place during mass exoduses and displacements, and requests the Commission to pay particular attention to the preparation and follow-up of the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on such measures, whose preparation and submission was requested by the Commission in resolution 1998/49.

6. TRP also invites relevant United Nations bodies, particularly the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to assume a common approach to re-establishing as soon as possible an effective United Nations presence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region.

7. Furthermore, the TRP urges the Commission and its member States to put political and diplomatic pressure on all the parties to the conflicts in Congo and Rwanda in order that they fully respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, and particularly the standards stipulated in the Geneva Conventions of 1949.

8. Another issue we would like to draw to the attention of the Commission is the longstanding problem of the 30 million Kurds living in Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey, where they constitute a minority, but considerable part of the population (approximately 20 per cent in Iraq, 15 per cent in Iran, 10 per cent in Syria and 20 per cent in Turkey), and where their rights and freedoms continue to be violated.

9. The situation of the Kurds in Iraq, where the Government is engaging in a broad array of human rights violations against its population in general, including mass arrests, torture, summary executions and "disappearances", is undoubtedly deteriorating, also owing to intra-Kurdish rivalry and conflict between the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) of Mr. Talabani and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) of Mr. Barzani in Iraqi Kurdistan. This region is further racked by the operations of the Turkish Kurdish guerrilla movement, the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), by significant military confrontations between KDP and PKK and by frequent Turkish military incursions targeting PKK bases in northern Iraq.

10. While the meeting and agreement between Mr. Barzani and Mr. Talabani on 18 September 1999, in Washington have given concrete hope for an end to factional fighting in Iraqi Kurdistan, the attack on the region targeting the PKK launched in November 1999 by 2,000 Turkish troops (undeterred by the United States policed no-fly zone) has resulted in the killing of over 1,200 people and the displacement of thousands of civilians from their homes.

11. The Iraqi Government's ethnic cleansing and Arabization policy in the Kurdish areas controlled by Saddam Hussein's forces continued to be very dire, especially in Kirkuk, Khanaqin, Jalawla, Mandali, Tuz and Makhmour. The triple pillar of this policy has been Arabization, deportation and Ba'athification. The massive settlement programme launched by the Government in 1970, when Kurdish workers from the region were deported to southern Iraq and replaced by Arabs, has today reached the figure of 300,000 settlers. These settlers have been economically and socially privileged to the detriment of the non-Arab population, whose land and properties have been confiscated and who have been denied employment and commercial activities.

12. According to a report of the United Nations Secretary-General (S/1997/685), there are already more than 500,000 internally displaced persons in the three northern Kurdish provinces of Iraq (Sulaimaniya, Arbil and Duhok); the large majority of them come from the above-mentioned areas. The forced eviction and confiscation of property continues on a day-to-day basis. During April and June 1998 alone, 1,468 Kurdish families were expelled from Kirkuk province to Iraqi Kurdistan. A number of relatives of the targeted families were reportedly detained and the food ration tickets and their property were confiscated. Tens of thousands of these internally displaced are living in tents and other miserable conditions.

13. The ruling Ba'ath Party has Ba'athified school materials, the media and daily life, and prohibited teaching in Kurdish and other minority languages in this province. Recruitment to the party, militia and other organizations also became obligatory. Privileges in all areas of life are accorded to its members, while punishment, discrimination and exclusion await those who refuse to join or obey them. Moreover, the survivors of the Anfal campaign of the 1980s (182,000 Kurdish victims, 4,500 Kurdish villages and towns destroyed) suffer from multiple diseases without any outside specialized health care. Over 10 million land mines planted in Iraqi Kurdistan have caused so far 15,000 civilian deaths since the Gulf war. Scores of others have been injured or maimed for life.

14. Turkey's centrality to the Kurdish conflict has to be acknowledged, since the relatively advanced level of civil society in Turkey opens the possibility of improvement. However, the political violence and certain legal restrictions on the part of Turkey, as well as grave violence towards the civilian population committed by both government forces and the PKK have contributed to a climate that is not conducive to dialogue and other conflict resolution strategies and efforts.

15. In 1998, several offices of the pro-Kurdish People's Democracy Party (HADEP) were raided and party administrators and members were detained and tortured and four party officials were charged with "separatism through publication" and "acting as the political branch of PKK". Four parliamentarians from the Democratic Party (DEP), banned by a 1995 decision of the Supreme Constitutional Court, remain in prison. Three other former DEP parliamentarians were sentenced in 1998 on charges relating to peaceful expression.

16. The provinces in south-east Turkey, where armed conflict between security forces and the PKK since 1984 has resulted in the deaths of about 35,000 civilians and the forced depopulation of thousands of villages and hamlets, remain under a state of emergency. Six provinces have been ruled by State-appointed governors with extraordinary measures and extended restrictive powers. Little effort has been made to facilitate the return of displaced persons to their homes or to compensate them for the destruction and loss of property.

17. Although the armed conflict in the south-east has lessened in intensity, both government forces and the PKK continued to commit serious human rights violations. Village guards - ethnic Kurds appointed by the Government in remote areas and "convincing" villagers not to assist the PKK - continue to be implicated in many abuses, such as rape, executions of civilians, forcing villagers to walk across mine fields or torturing family members and neighbours. PKK members have continued to execute civilians they suspected of cooperating with the security forces. In July 1998, PKK members reportedly killed two girls, aged 4 and 14, after they failed to find their father, who was the brother of the village headman. Three mayors in the south-east, who were said not to support the PKK, were kidnapped, and one of them was later murdered. In August 1998, a bomb reportedly planted by the PKK killed seven people and injured more than one hundred in one of Istanbul's most crowded historical marketplaces.

18. A newspaper advocating the recognition of Kurdish identity was fined approximately US$ 12,000 in 1998 and closed by court order for 312 days. Issues of a weekly in Kurdish, Hevi, known for its non-violent stance, were repeatedly confiscated dozens of times during the year. Sefik Beyaz, former head of the Kurdish Institute, was sentenced in March by the State Security Court to one year's imprisonment and a fine of US$ 100 for "making separatist propaganda by playing Kurdish music" during his election campaign in 1995. The Criminal Court of Istanbul ruled in May 1998 that officials of the Kurdish Culture and Research Foundation cannot conduct Kurdish language courses (prohibited by law).

19. Repression of the Kurds and other minorities in Syria is pervasive. Kurdish political organizations are outlawed and the gradual Arabization of fertile Kurdish lands continues, a process by which Kurds have been deported and their lands turned over to Arab settlers. Another major concern has been the denial of citizenship to approximately 200,000 Kurds, thus denying them their rights and freedoms. While the Syrian Government actively recruits young Kurds to the ranks of the PKK, encouraging them to do so as an alternative to mandatory service in the Syrian armed forces and to become involved in the struggle for Kurdish cultural and political rights in Turkey, it vigorously prohibits similar activities within Syria.

20. The accession of President Khatami in Iran and the will to reform declared by him represent an opportunity for improvement and give hope for the start of a political dialogue between the Government and its peoples, who have so far been denied fundamental rights and freedoms.

21. The TRP urges the Commission and its member States to undertake all possible means to make Iraq respect its obligations under United Nations Security Council resolutions, including resolution 688 (1991), which demands an end to the repression of Iraqi citizens.

22. The TRP furthermore calls on the Commission to charge the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to prepare a special report on the human rights conditions of the Kurds to be submitted to the Commission at its fifty-sixth session and to undertake all necessary steps to enhance the effective presence of the United Nations in Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey and expand monitoring and humanitarian assistance in these countries.

23. Finally, the TRP requests the Commission and all relevant United Nations bodies to start a speedy process for convening an international conference on the Kurdish question with the participation of all parties involved and under the auspices of the United Nations.

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